

AMERICAN MEMORY



Historical Collections for the National Digital Library



style guide

02.16.2005 VERSION 1.5

Introduction

The core of the Library's mission is "to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations." The National Digital Library Program has revolutionized this mission, creating online access for the general public to the nation's library.

The American Memory Web site is a key component of this project. It is a digital record of American history and creativity, a resource for scholars, educators, and lifelong learners.

THE STYLE GUIDE

American Memory offers more than 9 million items in more than a hundred different collections—and it's still growing. A Web site that's supposed to be a gateway to these treasures becomes a roadblock without good, intuitive design and navigation.

This guide lays out the basic principles necessary to make American Memory attractive and easy to use. It is intended as a manual for those working on or contributing to the site, and as a quick-reference resource as well.

The details herein are not set in stone, however. The style guide is an evolving product. American Memory is a dynamic project, and this guide will continue to reflect the site's growth.

INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE | PAGES 3-8

How the site is organized and why. The user should have no trouble figuring out the structure of American Memory and how different areas relate to one another.

NAVIGATION | PAGES 9-11

How to get around, both from one section of the site to another, and within local areas.

VISUAL ELEMENTS | PAGES 12-14

A visual guide to the new look and how it supports information architecture, navigation, and content.

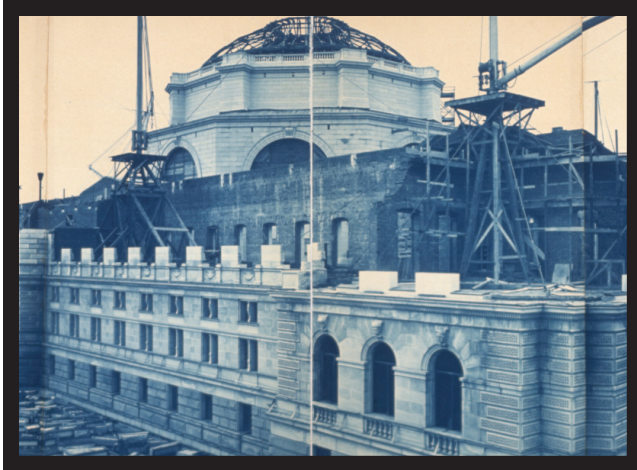
CONTENT | PAGES 15-22

A short course on writing effectively for the Web.

CHECKLIST | PAGES 23-24

A quick reference for the content provider.

Information Architecture



CONSTRUCTION OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PANORAMIC PHOTOGRAPHS, 1893

STRUCTURE

The American Memory site is organized into five major sections, all designed to make the historical collections easy to find and use:

Home—AM home page

Browse—portal to all digital collections

About—mission and FAQs

Help—for problems using the collections

Contact—how to write or talk to us

NAVIGATION

The site uses both global and local navigation to keep users oriented.

Global navigation refers to the ability to link to any of the five sections of the site from any other section. The top of every AM page features identical global navigation.

Breadcrumbs, which show the trail of links to a given page, are used to remind the user of how the site is structured.

Local navigation refers to collection or section-specific links that allow navigation within that particular collection or section. Local navigation generally takes the form of a left-hand navigation bar or embedded links.

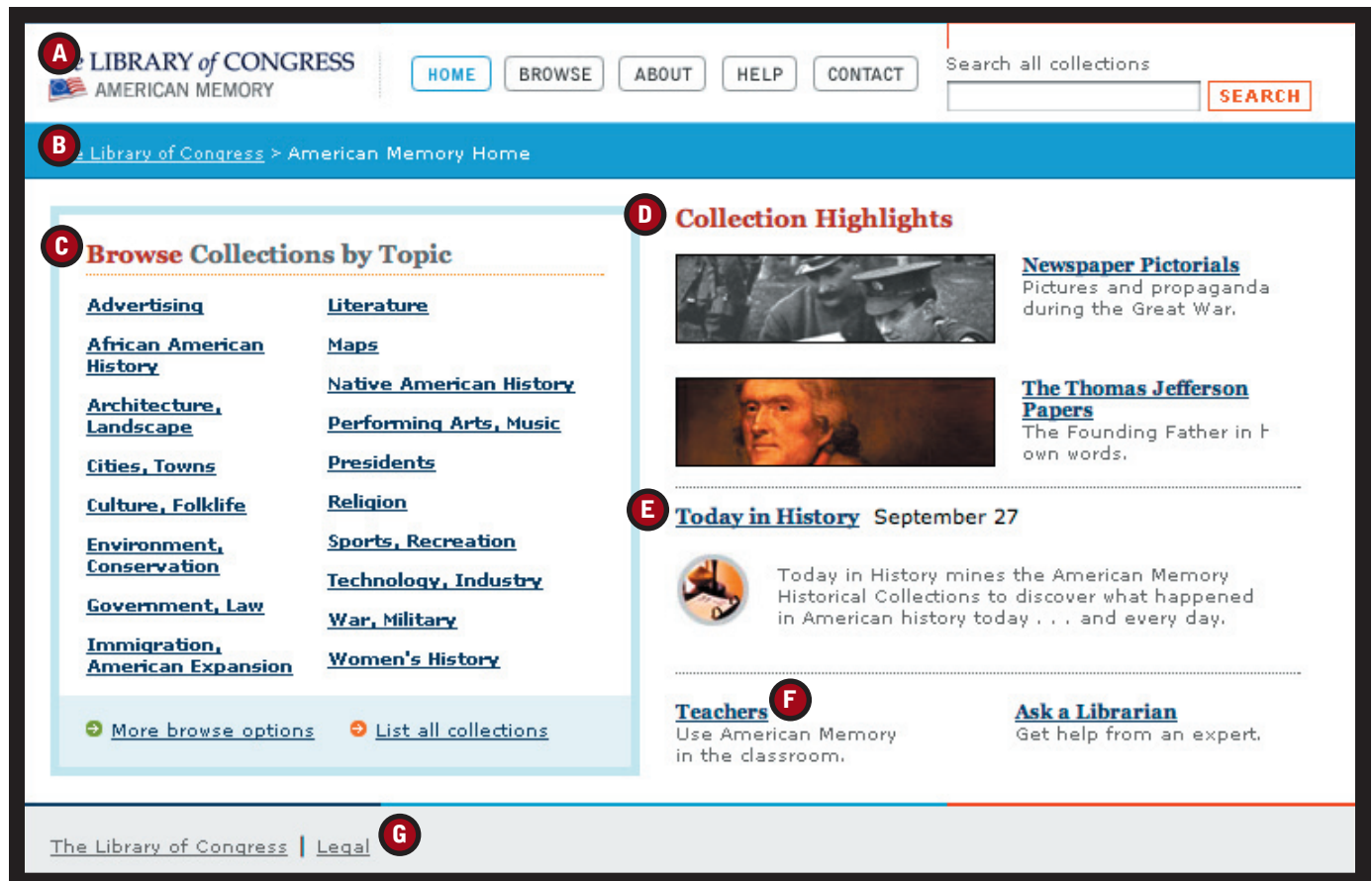
SEARCHING AND BROWSING

Every page features a global search box at the top right. Any search conducted here will search all the collections.

Each collection features a local search box that conducts searches only within that collection.

Home and Browse allow the user to peruse the collections in the style of an index or table of contents.

Information Architecture



HOME

The job of the AM home page is to be clear about what the site offers. Since the collections are the heart of American Memory, access to them is featured prominently here.

The global navigation bar and the large browse module clearly lay out the structure and main content of the site.

Collection Highlights and Today in History allow us to change the site daily, keep a fresh look, and feature interesting material to catch the casual reader's eye.

Teachers and Ask a Librarian provide access to two of our most popular and useful areas.

A. Global Navigation Header

AM logo, graphic text buttons that allow navigation between site sections (Home, Browse, About, Help, Contact), and global search box

B. Section Title Bar

Path-oriented breadcrumb only inside a colored banner directly beneath the global navigation header

C. Browse Module

List of broad collection topics followed by related browse function links

D. Collection Highlights

Two featured collections, rotating as needed, each with a linked title, image, and blurb

E. Today in History

Page title link with dynamic date above static copy and image

F. Teachers and Ask a Librarian

Page title links, each with a blurb

G. Global Footer

Text links to the Library of Congress and Legal home pages

Information Architecture

ABOUT, HELP, AND CONTACT

About, Help, and Contact are interrelated. The link for FAQs in About takes you to the Help section, and both About and Help contain links to Contact.

They are all part of the global navigation because a user might at any point want to know more about American Memory in general, need technical help, or need to send us a comment or report an error.

The layout and navigation of these sections also establishes a format for all the collection pages. The combination of global navigation header, section title bar, page title, and local (or left-hand) navigation on each page gives the user a clear sense of what she's looking at, what section she's in and how the page fits into that section, and how to navigate to a different part of the section/collection or a different part of the site.



A. Section Title Bar

Path-oriented breadcrumb inside a colored banner directly beneath the global navigation header, as on the home page, but with the section title added

B. Page Title

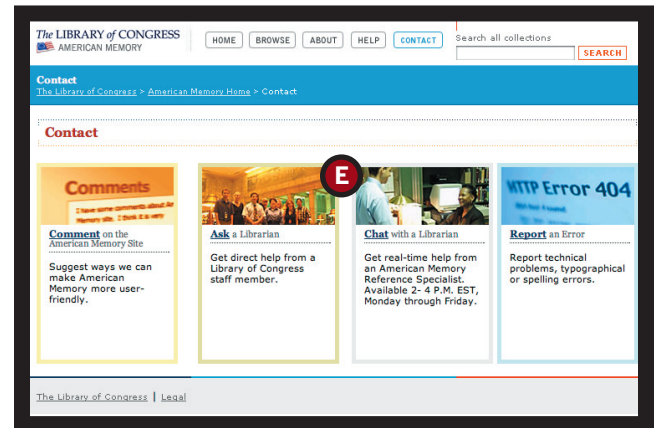
The title describing the overall content of this particular page ("Mission and History")

C. Page Subhead

Describes a subtopic of content on this particular page ("Mission")

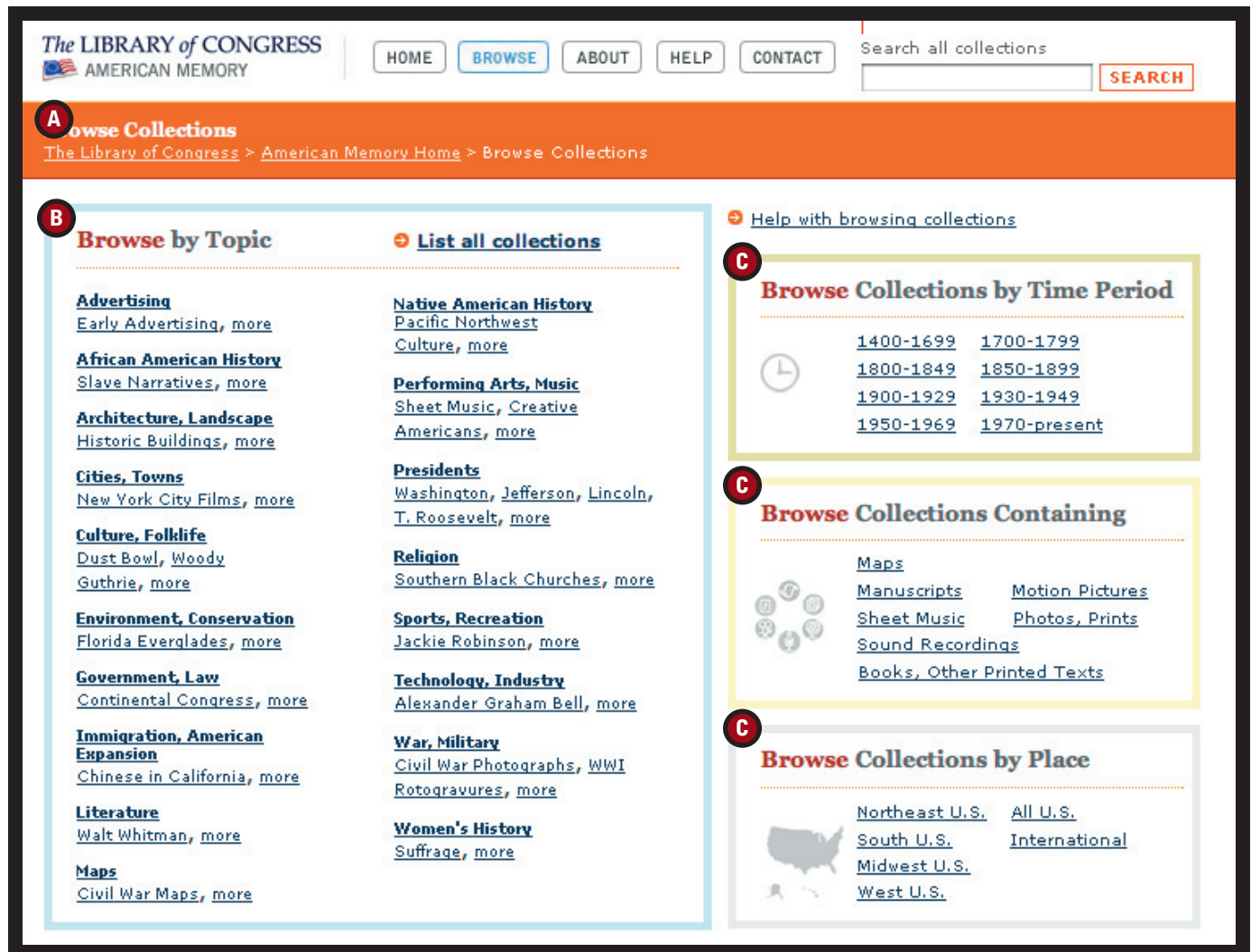
D. Left-Hand Navigation

Lists the other pages within that section



E. Row of Page Title Links with Images and Blurbs

Information Architecture

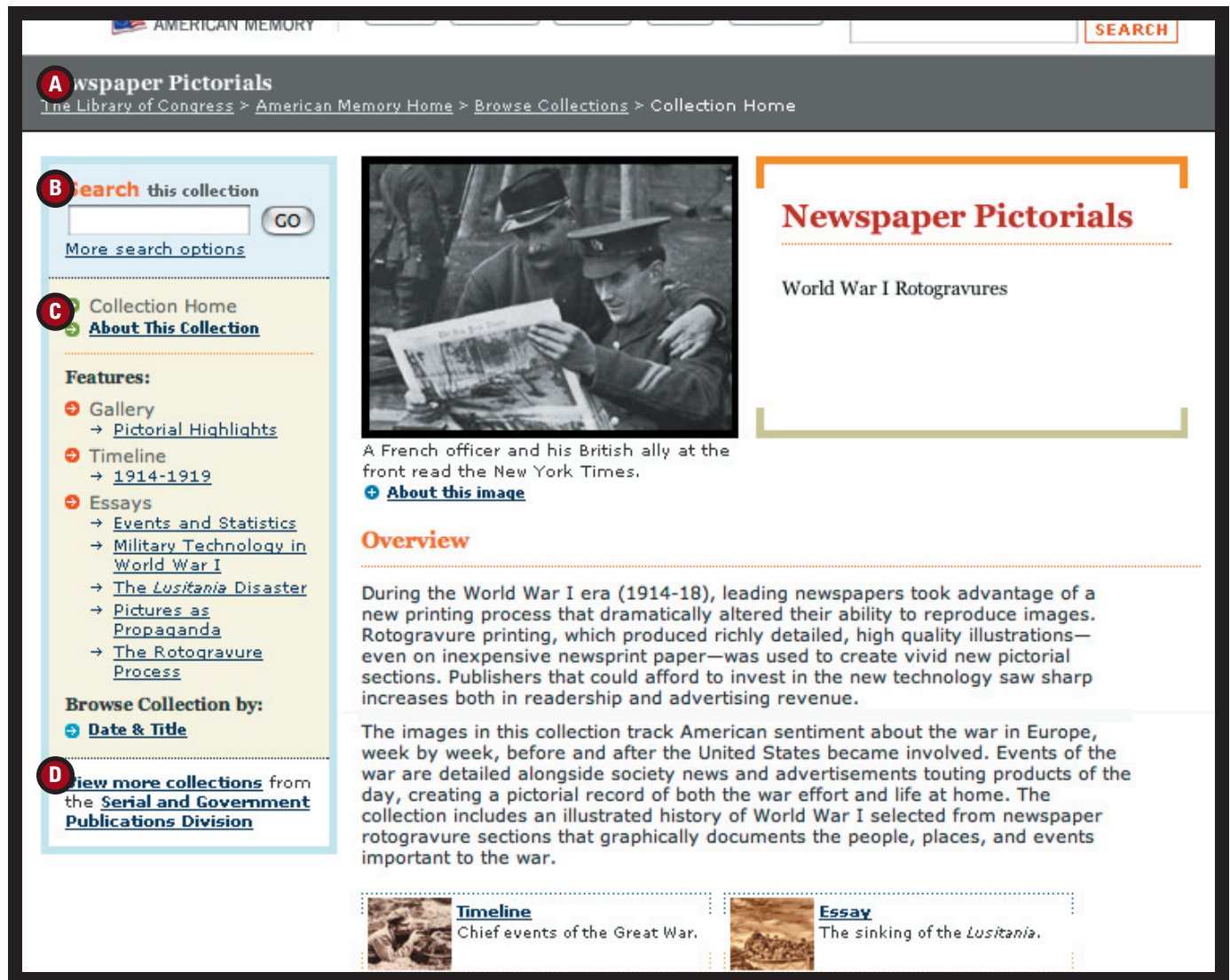


BROWSE: MAIN BROWSE PAGE

Functioning like a secondary home page, the top-level page of the Browse section gives the user a detailed overview of the collections content. It features the same browse module as the AM home page, but with more topics listed. And it also offers numerous other options for browsing or searching the collections.

- A. Section Title Bar
- B. Main Browse Module
- C. Related Browse Options

Information Architecture



BROWSE: SAMPLE COLLECTION

COLLECTION HOME PAGE

The collection home page (like the American Memory home page) should give the user a clear picture of what's in the collection and how the material is organized. And it should make the user want to know more.

The title, images, and navigation links are critical selling tools here. The overview text is important, but the typical Web user is likely to scan the title/subtitle and left-hand navigation to see if the collection has topics of interest.

A. Section Title Bar

Collection title takes the place of the section title

B. Collection Search Box

Searches only within the current collection

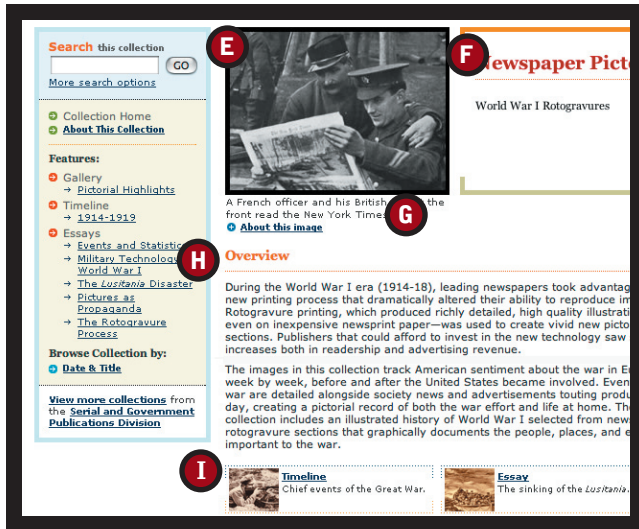
C. Left-Hand Navigation

Local navigation within the current collection

D. See-Also Links

Link to other collections from the same LC division and to teacher resources

Information Architecture



E. Key Image

Links to enlargement of image

F. Collection Title and Subtitle

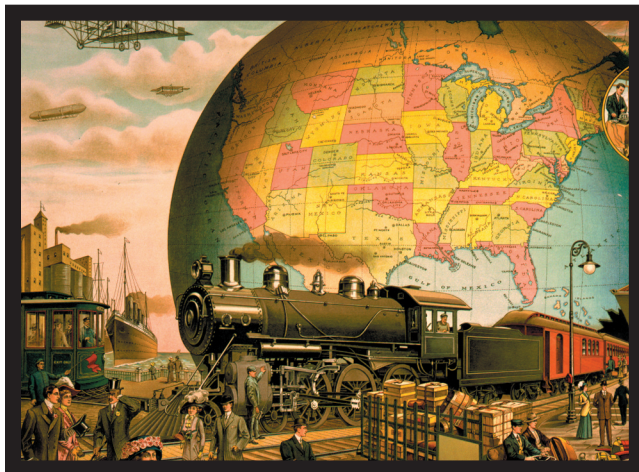
G. Key Image Caption and About This Image

Links to full bibliographical record

H. Overview Text

I. Feature Highlights with Images and Blurbs

Navigation



TWENTIETH CENTURY TRANSPORTATION / E.S. YATES, CHROMOLITHOGRAPH, C1910.

GLOBAL NAVIGATION AND SEARCHING

The top of every American Memory page features a global navigation header and a global search box.

The user can link to any of the five main sections of the site (Home, Browse, About, Help, Contact) or conduct a search of all the AM collections.

LOCAL NAVIGATION AND SEARCHING

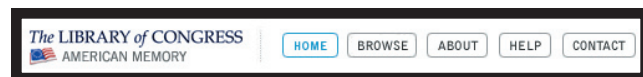
Left-hand navigation bars, embedded links, and other page, collection, or section specific links allow users to navigate within a page, collection, or section.

Each collection features a local search box that conducts searches only within that collection.

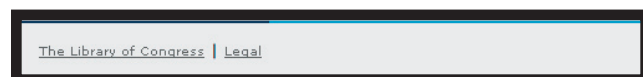
BROWSING

Home and Browse allow the user to peruse the AM collections in the style of an index or table of contents.

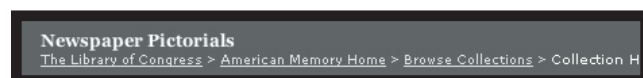
NAVIGATION ELEMENTS



AM Logo and Graphic Text Buttons
Elements of the global navigation header.

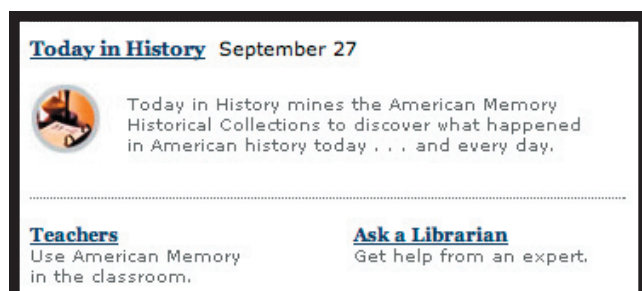


Global Text Links
Elements of the global footer



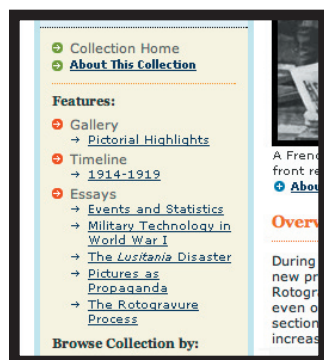
Section Title Bar
Section title for orientation and path-oriented breadcrumb for navigation.

Navigation



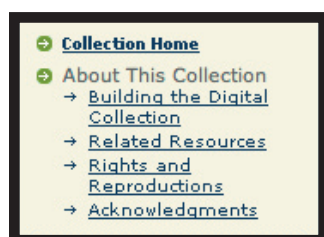
Page Title Links

A linked page/collection title that functions as a subhead. The link takes you to that page or collection.



Left-Hand Navigation

Local navigation within a collection or section. Lists all sections within a collection or section. Page you are currently on is grayed out.



About This Collection

The link About This Collection on the collection home page expands to reveal whatever subtopics are included: Building the Digital Collection, Related Resources, Rights and Reproductions, Acknowledgments, Cataloging

the Collection. All subtopics continue to be shown in left-hand navigation as long as you are within About This Collection.



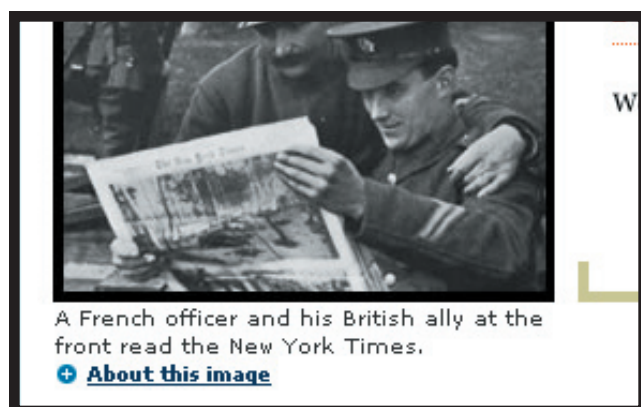
Related Function Links

Other browse or search options.



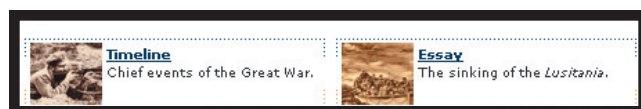
See-Also Links

Always follow the left-hand navigation. Link to non-American Memory information related to the collection.



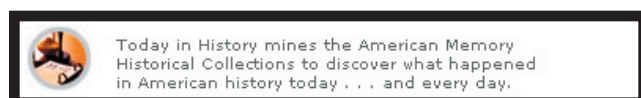
About This Image

Links to bibliographic record for an image.



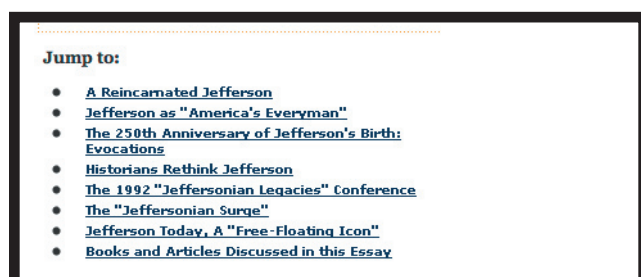
Feature Highlight Title

Links to specified feature of a collection (essay, timeline, etc.)



Wayfinder Images

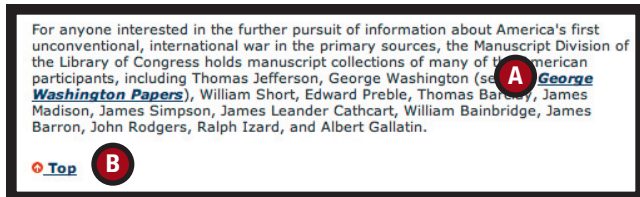
Non-linking images that offer visual cues to subject matter.



Jump-to Links (or Intra-page links)

Linked subheads that jump to designated sections farther down the same page.

Navigation



A. Embedded Links

Hotlinked words within text that take you to another page or section.

B. Back-to-Top Link/ Icon

Allows user to return to top of page in a long page or page with jump-to links.



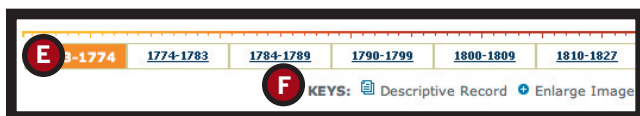
C. Multi-Page Navigation Bar

Allows user to view and jump to a different page of a feature.



D. Previous-Next Links

Allow user to navigate either forward or backward in a multi-page document.



E. Timeline Navigation Bar

Allows user to view and jump to a section of a timeline.

F. Icon Description Key

Page-specific explanations of local navigation elements or functions.

Visual Elements



SEE AMERICA : WELCOME TO MONTANA / R. HALLS, POSTERS FROM THE WPA, 1906

The design of American Memory is a product of the same thought and testing that went into information architecture and navigation. The visual elements used are integral to helping the user understand how the site is organized and how to get around.

These include typography that contributes to the overall clean look of the site, colors that signify to users what section they are in, and icons that enhance navigation.

TYPOGRAPHY

Typefaces have been chosen that work well together and address the challenges of on-screen display.

As a general rule, Verdana is used for body text and Georgia is used for headings or sub-headings.

VERDANA

Verdana is the primary typeface to be used in body text and links.

Sample-12pt.

VERDANA REGULAR

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
012345678910

VERDANA ITALIC

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
012345678910

VERDANA BOLD

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789

Visual Elements

GEORGIA

Georgia is the secondary typeface to be used in headings and sub-headings.

GEORGIA REGULAR

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
012345678910

GEORGIA ITALIC

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
012345678910

GEORGIA BOLD

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789

COLORS

PRIMARY COLORS



Page background
FFFFFF



Page subheads, page title headings
990000



Active links
003366



Navigation and content module outline
DE9F1



Side nav module background
FBFBE5



Collection side nav search module background
ECF8FF



Body text, visited links, collection title bar
666666

SECONDARY COLORS



Section title bar: Home, About, Help, Contact
6699CC



Search result title bar
000066



Browse title bar, action buttons
FF6600

ICONOGRAPHY



Descriptive record



Enlarge image



Next



Back-to-top

MOVIE FILE FORMAT



AUDIO FILE FORMAT



Visual Elements

SEARCH RESULTS THUMBNAILS



ICONS FOR “BUILT IN AMERICA” COLLECTION



Not yet digitized



Color photo



BW photo



Data page



Drawing



Photo caption

Content



HONGKONG & SHANGHAI BANKING CORPORATION RECORD OF ACCOUNTS, THE CHINESE IN CALIFORNIA, 1850-1925

I. WEB-FRIENDLY WRITING

American Memory is designed for a broad audience—laypeople as well as experts, children as well as adults. This presents a challenge. Content that may be academic or scholarly must be made accessible to the general public without compromising the material itself.

We don't want collection content to be in any way dumbed down. We do want to present it in a format that's easy to read and use online.

A LAYERED APPROACH

Usability studies have shown that about 80 percent of Web audiences scan rather than read. Even well-educated, well-read people scan, in part because reading on a computer monitor is slower and more tiring than reading print.

One way to deal with this limitation is to layer the content, from a snapshot of the overall collection to more in-depth material. Layering the material and connecting the layers with logical navigation allows different audiences to find what they need, and find as much as they need (see II. Some Specifics for Writing about Collections, below).

Within these layers, however, there are ways to make text more engaging in the online format:

THINK VISUALLY

The Web is graphic and interactive. People are accustomed to pages where text and images work together, and where hyperlinks connect related materials and let the user pick and choose what information to ingest.

When writing About This Collection or a feature essay, you have more than just words at your disposal. Think about the actual items in the collection (photos, document scans, audio clips) and how they could support the text. Something as straightforward as a timeline can become dynamic with links to photos or video.

Content

THINK SMALL

Because reading from a monitor is tiring, the medium demands a different physical appearance for text. Large blocks of text and long sentences intimidate Web users.

If you write a 3,000-word feature essay on George Washington, the Web team can break it up into “pages” for online reading. But your 3,000 words should be broken up into shorter text chunks than if you were publishing the essay in a journal.

“One idea per paragraph” is a good rule of thumb for the Web.

Bullets and subheads are Web-friendly as well:

- A meaty paragraph about a general’s military campaigns could be transformed into a bulleted chronology, for instance, without sacrificing important information
- Subheads are welcome change-of-idea visual cues in a long piece and help alleviate the sense of scrolling aimlessly downward

DIGITIZE

In print it is far more elegant to read seventy-eight or the twenty-first century spelled out. On the Web, they just add more words to the page. Digits save space and are more graphic (and thus, more Web-like).

As a general rule, write out only the numbers one through nine. Use digits from 10 on and for centuries (the 21st century). Combine digits and words for large quantities (2 million; 60 billion).

II. SOME SPECIFICS FOR WRITING ABOUT COLLECTIONS

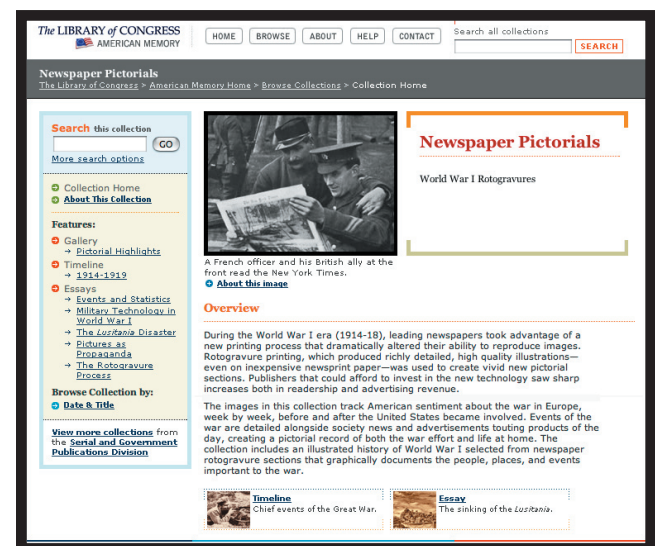
Each collection is built with the same combination of elements: an overview or home page; About This Collection; and one or more additional features (an essay, a timeline, a photo gallery).

These are all “layers” of the collection. The home page is a snapshot of what’s in the collection. One click takes you to the in-depth information contained in About This Collection—which includes its own subset of information (e.g., Acknowledgments).

Also one click away from the home page are any features. And the features themselves can connect readers to even more scholarly or comprehensive information—links to other Web pages, for example, or downloadable PDFs.

In print such layering might be dangerous—it would be up to the reader to reassemble the pages. But online, the layout and navigation system are designed to logically direct users from one layer to the next so that different audiences can satisfy different quests for information.

OVERVIEW PAGE



Brevity is the soul of the overview page. In part this relates to the new design of American Memory. If the titles of features or the collection are very long, they won’t fit properly within the space allotted. If the overview text is lengthy, it will push the right side of the page too far below

But it’s also important to keep the text short here because the casual reader is likely to skim the page first before deciding to plunge ahead.

Content

With that in mind, a few guidelines:

- Give the collection a good title—short, clear, and snappy if possible.
- Give the collection a good subtitle. It can be longer than the title, but should justify its existence by artfully elaborating on or complementing the title.
- Make the first sentence of your overview text count. Do not exceed 150 words total for the overview copy.
- Break into two paragraphs if more than 100 words. Highlight the most interesting aspects of the collection, but leave the details to pages in About This Collection.

Examples of details that generally should be part of the overview highlights:

- Relevant dates or date range of collection
- Library of Congress collection of origin
- Types of items available (e.g., sound recordings, still photographs, drawings, manuscripts)
- Examples of topics or subjects included in the collection (may be hyperlinked)

Examples of details that generally can be left to other pages:

- Quantities of materials included in the online presentation (unless this is a “wow” factor)
- Geographic areas covered
- Plans for collection updates, if known
- Acknowledgment of donor support, unless required by arrangement with donor

ABOUT THIS COLLECTION (REQUIRED ELEMENT)

About This Collection is why the overview text should be short. This area really is about the collection.



The main page may vary in length, depending on the nature of the collection, but longer pieces should be divided into topical subheadings for clarity.

Make the medium work in your favor. When you're discussing an item, the technology allows us to display or link to the very item you're discussing.

NOTE: About This Collection is not just about the online, digitized collection, but the physical collection from which it was digitized as well. The relationship between the physical and the digitized must be explained clearly.

Information typically included in About This Collection:

- Provenance of materials
- Library of Congress collection of origin
- Historical significance
- Details of physical collection contents, including quantities of materials, formats (photos, motion pictures, etc.), dates, and geographic areas covered
- Details of online contents
- Selection principles used for choosing which items to digitize
- Acknowledgment of donor support, if appropriate

Content

- Plans for collection updates, if known

Details that go on their own separate pages:

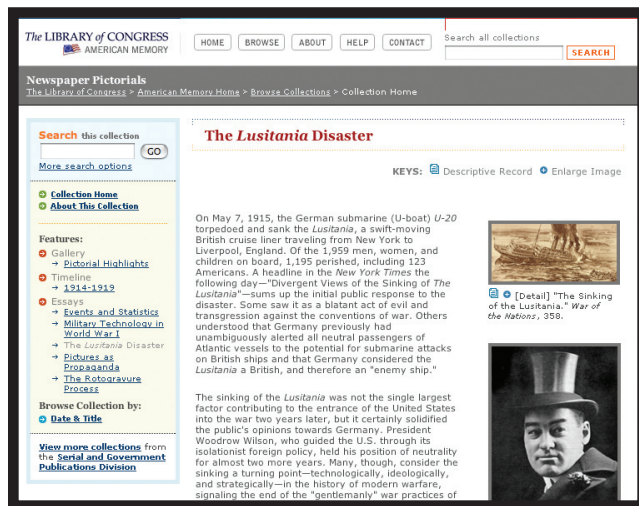
- Building the Digital Collection
- Related Resources
- Rights and Reproductions
- Acknowledgments

Not every collection will have all of these additional items.

FEATURES

Features are optional presentations related to or based on materials in the collection. They will generally take one of three forms:

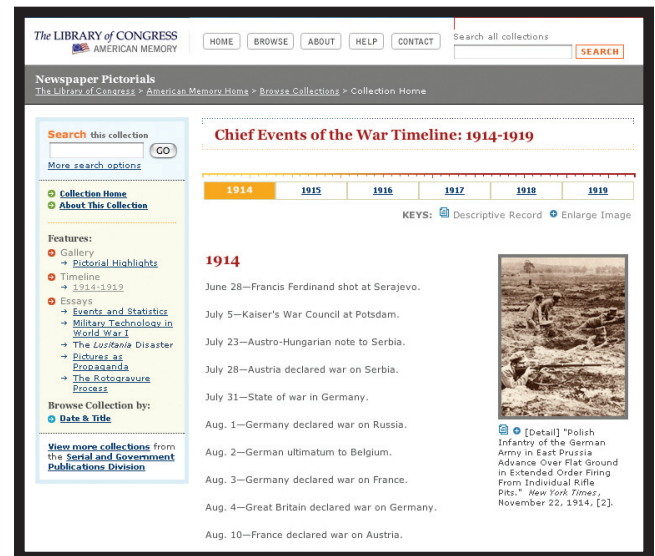
ESSAY



Biographies of subjects represented in the collection; biographies of the collectors themselves; historical essays. They are usually presented as text with images in a sidebar or text with images flowing throughout.

There is no specified length for essays, but remember to break up longer pieces into short paragraphs and use subheads.

TIMELINE



Timelines depicting overlapping events or chronologies of particular events, ideally illustrated with links to collection materials.

Text accompanying a timeline should be sentence fragments. And if the timeline is about, for example, the life of Thomas Jefferson, it's not necessary to use Jefferson's name.

Ex:

not
1800
John Doe was born in Nashville, Tenn. on September 3.

but
1800
Born Sept. 3, Nashville, Tenn.

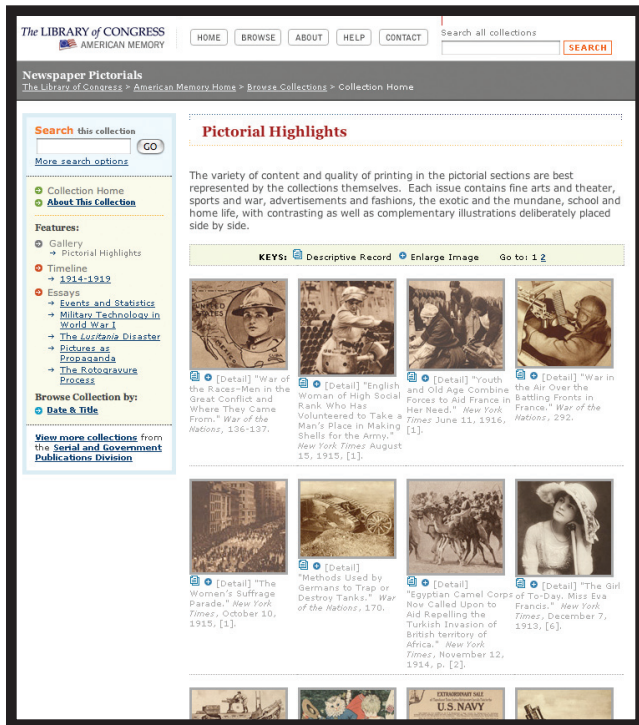
GALLERY

Photograph or image samplers; audio or video clip samplers. Primarily visual; any text should not overpower the images.

NOTE: In most cases the user will first see these features listed as links in the left-hand navigation bar on the collection home page. So think of a good, clear title, especially for essays, to make the user want to click there.

Content

GALLERY



Photograph or image samplers; audio or video clip samplers. Primarily visual; any text necessary should not overpower the images.

Many features will include a paragraph of introductory copy to set up the presentation. Because too much text will push down visually the beginning of a gallery, for instance, **introductory text must be limited to 50 words maximum.**

NOTE: In most cases the user will first see these features listed as links in the left-hand navigation bar on the collection home page. So think of a good, clear title, especially for essays, to make the user want to click there.

III. IMPORTANCE OF TITLES, HEADERS, CAPTIONS, AND BLURBS

If we accept that readers become scanners when they use the Web, it becomes that much more important to catch the user's eye with effective short text.

TITLES AND SUBTITLES

Titles should be no more than a few words and be unambiguous. Remember that titles will often be used out of context—listed on the American Memory home page or in a list of related links elsewhere on the site—so they need to be clear and, if possible, arresting on their own.

Subtitles can be used to add important information to the title while leaving the main title nice and short. But don't be redundant. "Theodore Roosevelt: All about the 26th President" is redundant. "Theodore Roosevelt: His Life and Times on Film" gives us more specific information about this collection.

HEADERS AND SUBHEADS

The word "header" is used on our site to describe a set of information (links, navigation) at the top of every Web page.

Subheads are used within the content of a page to visually break up information and enable readers to find subtopics that interest them quickly.

CAPTIONS

Captions are required for all images. They are placed directly below or next to images and briefly state what is illustrated.

BLURBS

Blurbs are the brief descriptive copy that follow hotlinked titles. Blurbs should never be more than one sentence, should tell users what they're in for, and entice them to click.

Ex (from AM home page):

Theodore Roosevelt (title links to TR collection)
T-Rex captured on film. (blurb)

Teachers (title links to the Learning Page)
Use American Memory in the classroom. (blurb)

Ex (from Collection home page):

Essay (title links to one of the TR essays)
Speeches from the 1912 Bull Moose campaign. (blurb)

Content

IV. TECHNICAL STYLE ISSUES

GLOSSARY:

Title Case

Capitalize the initial letter of each word, except articles, prepositions, and coordinating conjunctions.

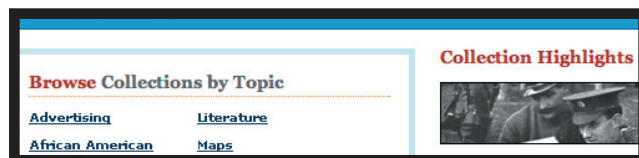
This Is an Example of Title Case.

Sentence Case

Capitalize only initial letter of first word.

This is an example of sentence case.

HOME PAGE



Page Subhead

Written in title case; not hotlinked. Used to describe specific content within a page.



Related Function Links

Written in sentence case.



1. Collection Highlights Title

Should be actual collection title, unless abbreviation necessary. Written in title case, 21 characters maximum. Hotlinked to collection home page.

2. Collection Highlights Blurb

Sentence case, with period. 75 characters maximum.



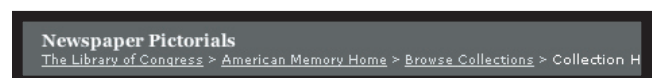
3. Page Title Link

Written in title case. Hotlinked to page or section of the same name.

4. Page Title Link Blurbs

Written in sentence case, with a period. One sentence maximum.

COLLECTION HOME PAGES



Section Title Bar

Full collection title, written in title case, bold, above the breadcrumb.

Content



A. Collection Title

Written in title case, 22 characters maximum, no period.

B. Collection Subtitle

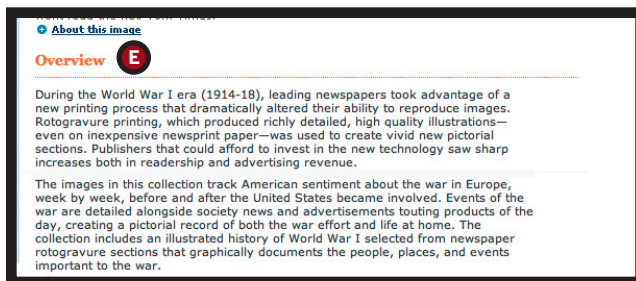
Written in title case, 100 characters maximum, no period.

C. Key Image Caption

One or more sentences, written in sentence case.

D. About This Image

Links to full bibliographic record for key image.



E. Overview Text

150 words maximum.



Left-Hand Navigation

F. Left-Hand Navigation Header

Written in title case, bold, followed by a colon. Not linked.

G. Left-Hand Navigation Items

Gallery, Timeline, Essay, etc—describes type of feature, plural or singular depending on quantity. Not linked.

H. Titles of Features

Should be actual name of page, if possible; abbreviate if necessary (36 characters maximum). Written in title case, hotlinked.

I. See-Also Links

Combination pagelink/blurb pointing to related areas. "View more..." changes depending on type of collection; written in sentence case. "Collection Connection" stays the same.

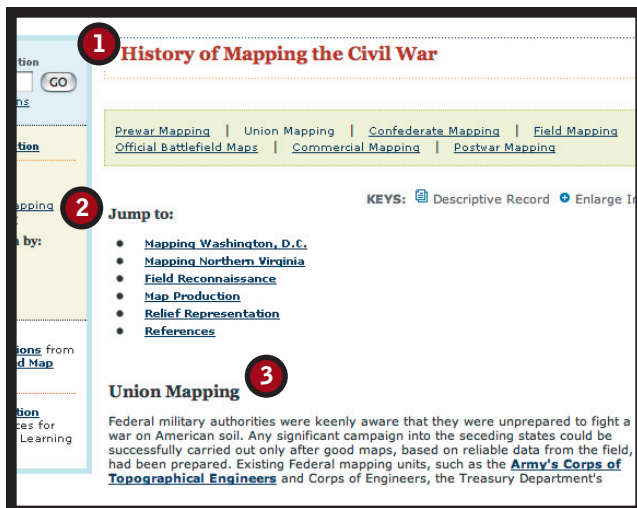
Content



J. Feature Highlight Blurb

Written in sentence case, with period.

FEATURES, BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD



1. Page Title

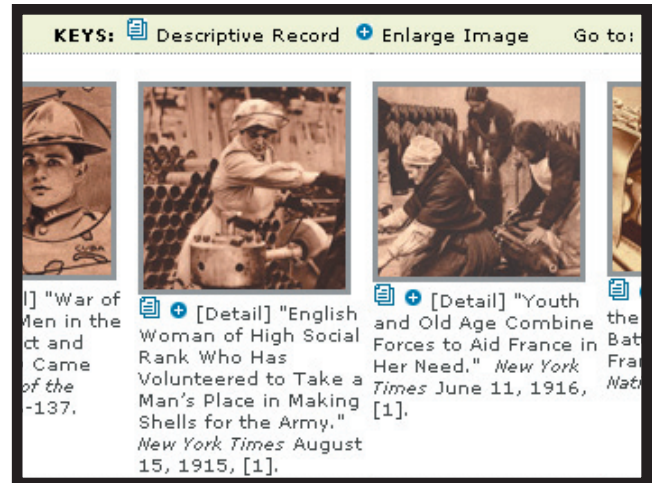
Title of feature or specific page only. Do not repeat collection title since it's in the title bar.

2. Jump-To Links (intra-page navigation)

Should duplicate the names of the subheads they link to (or date ranges, in case of timelines). Written in title case.

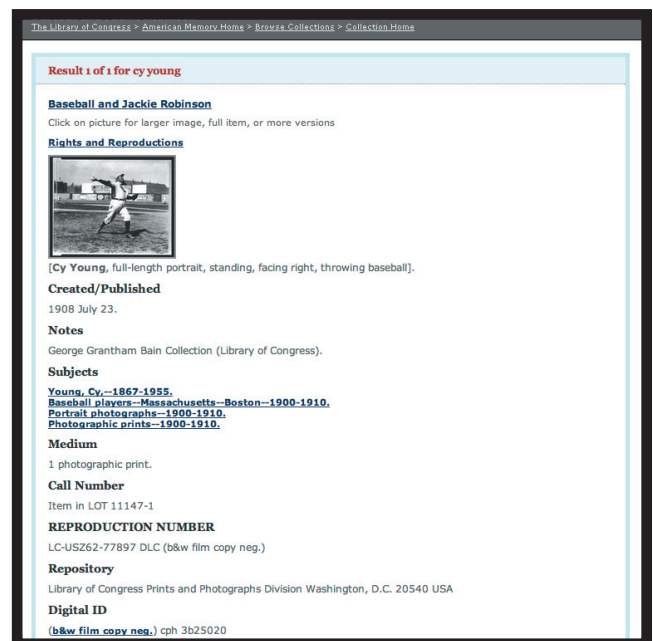
3. Subhead

Non-linking header for a specific area of content within a page. Written in title case, bold.



Caption

Required for all images. Placed directly below or next to image, briefly stating what is illustrated. Sentence case, period.



Bibliographic Record

Full information for a given image.

Building a New Collection: A Checklist



PORTRAIT OF LOUIS ARMSTRONG, PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF JAZZ, 1947

In general, content sent to the Web team should be arranged by page, like the collection itself. In other words, images and text for About This Collection should be grouped together, images and text for the collection home page should be grouped together, etc.

Text should be final copy only so the person building the new Web pages doesn't have multiple versions of the same text.

All images should be described by their filename and directory, so the designer/coder doesn't have to hunt for the right image. Any caption/bibliographic record information should be included with the relevant image.

FOR COLLECTION HOME PAGE:

- Collection title and subtitle: 22 characters maximum for title; 100 characters for subtitle
- Key image and two or three alternatives
- Caption for key image
- Links to enlargement and full bibliographic record for key image
- Overview text: 150 words maximum
- List of feature titles for left-hand navigation: 36 characters maximum
- Images for features to be highlighted at bottom of page
- One-sentence blurb for features to be highlighted

FOR ABOUT THIS COLLECTION:

- Text, images, and captions for main About This Collection page (required element)
- Text, images, and captions for Building the Digital Collection (optional element)
- Text, images, and captions for Rights and Reproductions (optional)

Building a New Collection: A Checklist

- Text, images, and captions for Acknowledgments (optional)
- Text, images, and captions for Related Resources (optional)

FOR FEATURES:

- Gallery
 - > Title for gallery
 - > List of images to be included
 - > Corresponding links to image enlargements and bib records
 - > Captions for each image
 - > Any intro text
- Essay
 - > Title of essay
 - > Text
 - > Section headers/subheads for longer essays
 - > Any supporting images
 - > Links to image enlargements and bib records
 - > Captions
- Timeline
 - > Period covered by timeline broken into no more than six date ranges
 - > Any supporting images
 - > Links to image enlargements and bib records
 - > Captions